DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 143 942 CG 011 726

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TITLE Understanding the Male Homosexual Experience: Grades 11, 12.
PUB DATE 28 Apr 77
NOTE 26p.; Pages 9-12 and 20-24 of original document are copyrighted and therefore not included

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Attachment Behavior; Behavior Change; Curriculum Guides; Emotional Development; *Homosexuality; Interpersonal Relationship; *Males; Program Descriptions; *Sensitivity Training; *Sex Stereotypes; *Social Discrimination

ABSTRACT

This unit has been designed as a means of sensitizing class members to various forms of social discrimination that exist against homosexuals. Each lesson can be adapted to a fifty minute class period; the steps indicate transitions in topic development, the key questions are recommended as guidelines for facilitating class discussion. Students will be confronted with suppositions, which are thought to assimilate their life experiences, and simultaneously reflect homosexual oppression. This will enable them to: (1) become familiar with homosexuals as ordinary human beings with a sexual preference for same sex members, and (2) attain greater empathy and understanding of the homosexual's dilemma. By representing the homosexual's experience in having their sexual identity oppressed, students will learn to understand: (1) why homosexuals may often hide their sexual orientation and/or behavior, and (2) the struggle that frequently occurs in affirming one's homosexuality. Through these lessons, students begin to realize the value of non-heterosexist and supportive individuals for homosexuals in adjusting to their homosexuality. Successful completion of this unit may be evaluated, by requiring students to design and conduct their own research, in finding possible explanations to why homosexuals are discriminated against in the American culture. (Author)

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UNDERSTANDING THE MALE HOMOSEXUAL EXPERIENCE: GRADES 11, 12

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Psychology 504: Individual Research

Dr. Robert Hefner

April 28, 1977

CG 011 726

Unit Objectives

This unit has been designed as a means of sensitizing class members to various forms of social discrimination that exist against homosexuals. Each lesson can be adapted to a fifty minute class period; the steps indicate transitions in topic development, the key questions are recommended as guidelines for facilitating class discussion.

Students will be confronted with suppositions, which are thought to assimulate their life experiences, and simultaneously reflect homosexual oppression. This will enable them to: 1) become familar with homosexuals as ordinary human beings with a sexual preference for same sex members, and 2) attain greater empathy and understanding of the homosexual's dilemma.

By representing the homosexual's experience in having their sexual identity oppressed, students will learn to understand: 1) why homosexuals may often hide their sexual orientation and/or behavior, and 2) the struggle that frequently occurs in affirming one's homosexuality.

Through these lessons, students begin to realize the value of non-heterosexist and supportive individuals for homosexuals in adjusting to their homosexuality. Successful completion of this unit may be evaluated, by requiring students to design and conduct their own research, in finding possible explanations to why homo-

sexuals are discriminated against in the American culture.

Basic Bibliography

The following reading materials are recommended as background information needed for conducting this unit.

Altman, D., 1973. Homosexual Oppression and Liberation. (New York: Avon).

Brown, H., 1976. Familiar Faces, Hidden Lives. (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).

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Nichols, J., 1975. Men's Liberation: A New Definition of Masculinity. (Penguin Books).

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LESSON 1

A SEXUAL PREFERENCE

OBJECTIVES

Attitude

1. Unique preferences characterize what it means to be an individual. By evaluating the experience of having a preference oppressed by others' expectations, students will become more empathic of the homosexual's position in our heterosexually-biased culture.

Knowledge

1. To understand that homosexuality is a sexual preference for members of the same sex.
2. Students will begin to explore reasons why social discrimination exists against homosexuals, gaining an understanding that such reasons are at least implicitly based upon fear.

OVERVIEW OF CONTENT

Introducing the topic of homosexuality in a way that is <u>least</u> threatening is of crucial importance, as the students have inevitably been predisposed to the subject matter (via mass media, peers, parents, etc.) in a way that excludes homosexuals from the status of ordinary human beings, and this could be counter-productive in becoming more understanding and empathic of the gay experience. For this reason, the

main teaching strategy will be to provide students with a frame of reference which will ideally facilitate class discussions in subsequent lessons, treating homosexuality as a relevant issue in the lives of "presumed-to-be" heterosexual students.

The instructor will reconstruct the experience of having a preference oppressed by others' expectations, placing the students into the "boots" of second-class citizens. Considering students as unique individuals, who value having their <u>own</u> preferences accepted and valued, they will be encouraged to express their reactions to having their preferences rejected by others. The class eventually gains an empathic understanding of the homosexual's dilemma.

<u>Suggested Teaching Procedure</u>

STEP ONE: The instructor might reconstruct the homosexual's dilemma in the following manner:

> "Pretend there was a law prohibiting everyone from eating meat, and anyone caught doing so would be treated as inferior to others. You secretly discovered this to be your favorite dish, and met others who also enjoyed eating meat. You dislike having to hide from anti-carnivores in order to satisfy your appetite. At home, your parents deny the fact that you eat very few

vegetables at dinner. Your parents are always "putting down" known carnivores with all kinds of labels. If you tell them your preference in the hope they will learn to understand and accept it, they may disown you; yet your carnivorous preference has become a way of life."

Questions:

1. "How do you feel about your situation?"
2. "What would happen if you allow this situation to continue, and your parents discover your preference through someone else? How might this effect your relationship with your parents?"
3. "What if the anti-carnivore law was more rigidly enforced, and known carnivores were publicly exposed and ridiculed. How might this effect your preference for meat?"
4. "Are there times in your life when others disagreed with your preferences? Or have you ever conformed with others' preferences out of fear of being rejected?"
5. "Why are preferences of any value and importance? What would it be like, if you were not allowed to have any preferences at all in life?"
6. "Who is to decide what is best for you?"

The first five questions were designed to direct the students towards critically examining the

dilemma of having a preference which is considered socially unacceptable. By posing Question 6, the instructor stimulates the discussion into a decision-making process, in which students evaluate the importance of upholding their individuality over culturally conditioned preferences.

The instructor then introduces the idea that individuals with a sexual preference for same sex members find themselves in a similar predicament. Using the forementioned example as an analogous dilemma, the teacher proceeds to explain that people in our society are presumed to be heterosexual, just as the law presumed that everyone would be a vegetarian. Being attributed a lesser status over heterosexuals, they are often compelled to hide their identity, and secretively pursue relationships. At home, their parents may deny the fact that they rarely date opposite sex members. "Queer", "faggot", "fairy", ... are but a few labels which many parents (and other members of society) use in reference to homosexuals. If a homosexual decides to inform his parents that he is "one of them" whom they show hatred towards, he risks being disowned by those whom some claim "love you no matter what". Though they may feel ashamed of you, if you don't expose yourself they will continue to ask "When are you getting married?", or "How is your love life?" A homosexual

finds himself in a position of either trying to fake being a "straight", --e.g., making up love affair stories that are totally foreign to his life--or run the risk of exposing his true identity.

STEP TWO:

Questions:

1. "How would you attempt to resolve this conflict if you were homosexual?"

   Handout One should be distributed, which informs students how one homosexual dealt with his situation.

2. "How do you feel about what you have read? Do you agree, or disagree, with how the conflict was handled? Why do you feel this way?"

   To stimulate a wide range of responses and enhance the classes' awareness of reasons people have for discriminating against homosexuals, the issue of candidly announcing one's homosexuality may be probed more deeply in the following way.

3. "How might people (friends, parents, teachers, etc.) react if you were a homosexual and "came out" publicly? How might this effect your relations with others?"

   a) "Why are homosexuals treated like...(summary)? What do you think might happen if homosexuality was accepted as heterosexuality is today?"

Student response to the latter inquiry may be summarized by the instructor as possible reasons why people feel threatened by homosexuality. To deter individuals from engaging in homosexual behavior, it is represented as a less desirable sexual preference--e.g., by ridiculing them with labels and "jokes". Regardless of whether existing laws strictly prohibit homosexual activities, there are unwritten codes of conduct which define what is considered socially undesirable. The instructor poses Question 4, helping students grasp the social significance of stereotyping homosexuals.

4. "In what ways are homosexuals different from heterosexuals (appearance, behavior, occupational trends, hobbies, etc.)?"

Characteristics of the homosexual stereotype are summarized as indicators of a person who is denigrated as "less of a man". By stereotyping homosexuals as effeminate, with emphasis and reinforcement placed upon the culturally defined "masculine" role, homosexuality becomes perceived as an undesirable sexual preference. The instructor, citing examples from student responses, acknowledges these "differences" as ways in which homosexuals have been designated an inferior status; class members are reminded that the basic difference

between homosexuality and heterosexuality is that of sexual preference.

Reading Assignment

To become aware of some implications that the homosexual stereotype may have, Handout 2 should be distributed as a reading assignment for the next class session.

LESSONS 2, AND 3

COMING OUT OF THE CLOSET

Objectives

Attitudes

1. To demythologize the association made between effeminacy and sexual identity, and become aware of homosexual men as ordinary human beings.
2. To become aware that homosexual relationships can engender both a sexual attraction and an emotional involvement, just as heterosexual relationships can.
3. To develop a greater respect for homosexuals who are courageous enough to "come out".

Knowledge

1. To realize that certain aspects of the masculine sex role stereotype can be taken as symptoms of homophobia.
2. Students will become more attuned to specific forms of social discrimination against homosexuals, and will gain insight on: a) how these forms can mislead a "closet" homosexual into believing that adjustment can be ideally attained through self-denial of his

sexual identity, and b) why it is difficult to accept and openly announce that one is a homosexual.

3. To understand the significance of a non-heterosexist and supportive individual for a "closet" homosexual in adjusting to his sexual identity.

Overview of Content

Attaining insight on the homosexual's experience is a significant accomplishment, for most everyone has been socialized to view homosexuality from a one-sided (heterosexist) perspective, in which social discrimination is too often accepted unquestioningly. Given this consideration, the main teaching strategy for Lessons 2 and 3 will be to represent the homosexual's experience in contending with social discrimination; so that students will learn to understand: 1) why homosexuals frequently subject themselves to self-oppression by hiding their sexual identity, and 2) the struggle in affirming one's homosexuality. This will prepare them to eventually initiate their own objective study, concerning the question of why social discrimination against homosexuality exists in our culture.

In Lesson 2, the instructor confronts the class members with the inclination they may have to deny responsibility by making excuses for their behavior, in an effort to relate their own tendency with that of the "closet" homosexual. Handout 2 is discussed

in terms of this tendency, in which football player David Kopay and Ted find an excuse for their homosexual behavior. David's resistance to affirm his sexual identity is analyzed in the context of a possible dissonance between an internalized "masculine" value system and the homosexual stereotype of effeminacy. Closure is reached in this discussion, by presenting a supposition in which the class evaluated the role of "masculine" characteristics in the "coming out" experience; it is hoped that courage, and willingness to accept responsibility for one's homosexual behavior, will be realized as "masculine" attributes needed in the struggle to "come out".

To insure that the students have attained a clear conception of what constitutes homosexuality, it is recommended that the instructor initially conducts a debriefing session in Lesson 3, which includes consideration of the assigned reading (Handout 4). A transition in the class discussion should subsequently be made, which integrates previous learning experiences, gained from this unit, with a more comprehensive and genuine understanding of what it presently means to be a homosexual in our culture.

Lesson 1

Suggested Teaching Procedure

STEP ONE: The teacher may begin class by introducing

the problem of denying responsibility for one's actions in the following manner:

"How many completed the reading assignment? (Students raise their hands.) What happened to the rest of you?"

Once student responses have been elicited, the instructor explains that people, at one time or another, have a tendency to avoid responsibility by excusing or jusfifying their behavior.

Questions:

1. "In the reading, how did David and Ted excuse their homosexual behavior?"
   a) "In justifying their behavior, how did this effect their relationship?"

   Responses to the latter question may need to be clarified by the teacher--e.g., "In this way...(summary), they denied responsibility for their homosexual behavior, denouncing any physical intimacy they may have shared."
2. "What did you find in the reading which suggests that David <u>was</u>, in fact, emotionally attracted to Ted?"
3. "If he felt this way...(summary), then why didn't he openly discuss his deeper feelings with Ted, rather than keep them hidden?"

Although Question 3 would seem to require pure speculative thinking, it was designed to stimulate the class into synthesizing information from the previous lesson. The instructor encourages class members to express their opinions, based upon their present awareness of how social discrimination may effect homosexuals. Such an open-ended question will ellicit a wide range of responses, and the instructor's best judgement is relied upon in making the transition to Question 4. Before posing the question, it may be necessary for the instructor to summarize the students' description of a homosexual from Lesson 1 (STEP TWO: Question 4).

4. "How does the homosexual stereotype differ from what you know about David?"

Although the differences may seem self-evident, it is unlikely that students will readily acknowledge that David may have internalized "masculine" values to the extent of self-oppression. For this reason, Handout 3 may be used to incite a more direct confrontation with the issue.

STEP TWO: Handout 3 should be distributed and read in class.

Questions:

1. "How do <u>you</u> feel about the "macho defense"? Why do you feel this way?"

The instructor needs to use her/his own discretion, in deciding whether or not Question 1 would benefit the class discussion. Some students may not be shocked by the reactionary handout material, some may even be humored by its sarcastic style, while still others may have strong feelings which need to be ventilated to promote more objective discussion; here the general classroom atmosphere concerning the unit thus far may serve as a helpful indicator of the value in raising this question.

2. "Based upon the handout, what is the "macho" role defending against? What function do you think it serves in our culture?"

3. "If David internalized the values of the "macho defense", how would this have made it difficult for him to 'come out'?"

After evaluating the "macho defense" in Questions 2 and 3, students are presented a supposition which requires them to make a decision; the first alternative would necessitate courage in the face of social discrimination and oppression, the second course of action would signify succumbing to the oppression of heterosexism. The supposition may be presented in the following manner:

4. "What if David kept his homosexual feelings hidden,

Lesson 2 Handout 3

The "Macho" Defense

Straight men think nothing of viewing their "masculinity" as proof that they are not queer. Providing the rules of the game are not broken, a sense of security and social influence are some of the benefits to be reaped. To make sure you are safe from being labeled a faggot, the following advice is recommended.

Keep Your Distance! Enjoy and value your male friendships, but don't get too close. Show your friendship through such actions as backslapping, rib poking, and hand shaking. Don't ever cherish your male friendships with too much meaning, too much investment of time and effort, too much emotional involvement. Never embrace another man, or show affection towards him: this could lead to an unnatural act!

Develop A Hard Shell! Don't cry, only sissies do. Prove that you are strong, not weak. Deal with your problems realistically, never letting your emotions get in the way. Face up to the hard facts of life; don't be a coward.

Never Associate With Queers! Friendship with faggots will jeopardize your male ego. Pity them, as they are second-class citizens. Better yet, keep them in their place by jeering at them, constantly reminding them of their lowly position in the social stratum. Let them know that you are a man. This makes your image look that much better.

eventually got married and raised a family. Three years later, he then decided he could only be happy leading a totally homosexual existence, and left his dependent wife and children (ages 1 and 2)."

4. "In which case would you consider David's behavior as most 'manly':
   a) If he had accepted responsibility for his homosexuality before he had gotten married, and 'came out', or
   b) If he had continued to accept the responsibility of his wife and children, secretly pursuing homosexual relationships?"

Reading Assignment

To gain a better understanding of the difficulties a person may experience in discovering he is a homosexual, and what it might be like to openly admit to yourself and others that you are a homosexual, the class is informed that they will be taking a look at a youth's experience of growing up gay. Handout 4 should be distributed as a reading assignment for the next class meeting.

Lesson 3 Handout 5

DANIEL

This reading selection concerns a homosexual who grew up in a small town. A vivid account of extreme rejection he received from his peers, Baptist minister father, brothers, etc., which eventually resulted in deportation to New York financially supported by his parents as a high school graduation present. (Brown, 1976: 89-95).

Lesson 3

Suggested Teaching Procedure

STEP ONE: The instructor may initiate the debriefing session in the following manner:

"In considering the readings and class discussions, what evidence do you think suggests that a person is homosexual?"

1. "Would you consider a person homosexual, if he engaged in sexual relations with another guy without <u>any</u> emotional involvement?"

3. "How did Brian reach the conclusion that he was gay?

The instructor proceeds to direct the students toward critically evaluating Brian's conclusion, by asking:

a) "Wasn't the fact that Brian had managed to get a girl pregnant <u>proof</u> that he was really heterosexual?"

Another strategy that could be used, involves the teacher putting her/himself in a devil's advocate position, by stating:

b) "Brean's nervous breakdown was not <u>really</u> the result of pretending to be straight, but a way of excusing himself for the eventual birth of an illegitimate birth. He would have been happier, if he eventually married this girl and kept his gay feelings a secret."

STEP TWO: The following questions are suggested as guidelines in facilitating class discussion, helping students become more empathic of the "coming out" experience and aware of its

consequences for the homosexual.

Questions:

1. "What important factors in Brian's life made it difficult for him to 'come out'?"
   a) "How do you feel about Brian 'coming out'? Would you be ashamed of him, if he was you brother: How would your position among your friends compare to the struggle he went through in 'coming out'?"
   b) "Why was his friendship with a bisexual woman an important turning point in 'coming out'? What did she provide for him that was unique in his life, and helped him eventually 'come out'?"
2. "What are the worst things that could have happened to Brian, if he had 'come out' in the South?"

   The teacher instructs the class to break into small groups of 4 - 5 peopled, and list at least three things that could have happened to Brian if he had come out in a rural community. "How woud people (classmated, teachers, parents, etc. react towards him? What are the worst things that could happen?"
3. "If you were Brian, and **people** treated <u>you</u> this way, how would you feel about yourself?"
4. "If you would feel...(summary), then why do you

think people would react this way?"

Following this activity, the teacher informs the class that they will find out how accurate some of their predictions are, by reading about one such case.

Reading Assignment

Handout 5 should be distributed as a reading assignment for the next class session.

LESSON 4 +
EVALUATION

Overall Objective

To synthesize various forms of social discrimination discussed in previous lessons, stimulating the class members to conduct their own preliminary investigation in understanding why homophobia exists in our culture.

Suggested Teaching Procedure

STEP ONE: To promote student interest in the question of why social discrimination exists in our culture, the following procedure is suggested.

First, the instructor can direct the class members to the research question, by clarifying the existing forms of social discrimination.

1. "In the reading (Handout 5), how did people (classmates, teachers, parents, siblings, etc.) react towards Daniel?

2. Account for variations in the way people reacted.
   a) E.G.: "Why do you think Daniel's mother and sister treated him better than his father and brothers?"
   b) "What might this suggest to you about homophobia?"
3. Synthesize other forms of social discrimination against homosexuals, based upon the learning experiences from previous lessons.
   a) E.G.: "In our readings and discussions, what other ways have we found that homosexuals are discriminated against?"
4. "Why are homosexuals discriminated against in our culture?"

Question 4 is posed as the central question of investigation, in which students will design and conduct their own research in finding possible "answers" for. In considering this question, several approaches may be employed, depending upon the students' needs, interests, concerns in relation to the particular kind of course in which this unit has been used. Given this consideration, some possible approaches have been listed below as examples. Regardless of the approach used, the instruc-

tor's role will be to act as a consultant and resource person for the class members; therefore, the instructor's field of expertise is an important consideration in developing an approach, but not necessarily a deciding factor.

STEP TWO: The instructor might consider the relevancy and value in using the following approaches suggested below.

Some Possible Approaches:

1. Experimental.

   a) Surveys and/or self-report inventories could be used by students as techniques for testing their own hypothesis. For example, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974: 155-162) and a survey designed as an indicator of an individual's level of homophobia could be employed to test the relationship that may exist between the masculine sex role stereotype and homophobia.

   b) Consenting students enrolled in a similar course might be considered as a possible subject pool. In all cases, participation must remain anonymous, and share this understanding. Participants may be informed of the general results and purpose of the study, following the completion of the research project.

   c) Instructor's prerequisites: a background in

survey design, inventory administration, and statistical analysis (esp. correlation coefficients).

2. Anthropological

   a) The possible relationship between the "macho defense" and homophobia may be studied from a cross-cultural perspective.

   b) Materials needed: informational sources which relate how homosexuality is viewed in other cultures, and their respective definitions of the masculine sex role. This might possibly be made available through the University of Michigan's Human Relations Area File (Graduate Library), in which cross-cultural studies on any given subject area is conveniently accessible.

3. Historical

   a) Given the Puritanical way of justifying sexual behavior as a necessary means of maintaining the family institution, students may wish to study homophobia as it relates to these sexual attitudes. If it is discovered that homosexuality became taboo becauses it is detrimental to societal needs (e.g., propogation of the species, promoting the family institution, religious and moral values, etc.), the student will have the task of interpreting the present dissonance this has for present

realities (e.g., the sexual revolution, the myth that acceptance of homosexuality will unfavorably effect population growth, changing attitudes among certain religious organizations towards homosexuality, etc.).

STEP TWO: To evaluate the student's successful completion of this unit, the instructor may require a written report which includes;

1. Description of how the study was conducted and/or what considerations were made.
2. Results
3. Conclusion and Discussion

To make the "evaluation" more relevant than a simple grade determination, the instructor may wish to provide the class members with an opportunity to share their research findings. Not to be confused with a graded project presentation requirement, the students may value sharing their learning experiences as a way of: a) gaining a more comprehensive perspective of why social discrimination against homosexuals may exist, and 2) deciding upon what course of action this may necessitate in helping to alleviate homophobia.